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SUBJECT: CODEL OBAMA MEETS WITH JORDAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: AMMAN 151

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d).

1. (U) Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) met with Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdelelah Khatib on January 9. The Senator was joined in the meeting by his staff, the Ambassador, and poloff.

2. (C) Sen. Obama thanked Khatib for his successful efforts to persuade Jordan's parliament to ratify the Article 98 agreement (reftel). Khatib responded that Jordan's relationship with the United States is very important. Even if there are policy disagreements, he added, the good will that is behind the relationship remains intact. While the GOJ appreciates the friendship of the U.S., the regional situation sometimes poses challenges for the bilateral relationship, as it affects the mood of the people.

3. (C) Khatib expressed his concerns over Iraq. The region cannot afford a U.S. failure, he said - the consequences would be dire. If the U.S. military were to leave Iraq too soon, according to Khatib, Iran would benefit to the detriment of regional stability. Khatib said that it was central to success in Iraq for the U.S. to work to rebuild institutions. The nation-state concept with which the West was so familiar was not very strong in the Middle East, he said. The substitute would be a strong institution, such as the military. He said that a strong, unified Iraqi military could be the "melting pot" for Iraq, where Sunni Arab, Shia, and Kurd factions could come together. On Iran, Khatib noted that the Gulf states were likely more nervous than Jordan about Iran's nuclear ambitions. However, Jordan, too, was concerned, and in the unfortunate position of having to live between Iran, Iraq, and Israel.

4. (C) Khatib noted that PM Sharon was a "bulldozer, unmatched in terms of making a decision and having the political will to implement it." He said that the future depended on Israel's ability to fill the leadership vacuum left by Sharon. It would be more difficult for Jordan to deal with Israel post-Sharon, he said. He expected that since Israel was a democracy, it would undergo a successful transition.

5. (C) Khatib echoed familiar comments heard here that Abu Mazen was weak, partly due to the lack of support he was getting from outside his borders. "We are not empowering him," said Khatib. The living conditions for the average Palestinian were untenable, and the PA had no ability to enforce the law. Khatib mentioned the Badr Brigade to Sen. Obama as a highly trained Palestinian police force that could help, but had still not been invited to return to the West Bank from Jordan. Khatib emphasized the importance of U.S. engagement in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. He also stressed that Palestinians in Jerusalem must be allowed to participate in the upcoming elections. "If Israel does not concede this, Abu Mazen will have to postpone the vote." Answering Sen. Obama's question about concerns over HAMAS, Khatib said that every Arab country has an Islamist contingent. Of course they would get some votes, "but that is OK." Exclusion would create tension, and it was tension that Islamists thrive on.

6. (U) Senator Obama's party did not have and opportunity to clear this message.
Hale